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## ABSTRACT

This issue of NCEDL Spotlights, a newsletter of the National Center for Early Development and Learning, synthesizes information presented at the Making Gains conference held at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill in February 1999. The focus of the conference was on the role of teacher education level and compensation for improving the quality of early childhood programs and the outcomes for children. The newsletter notes that the quality of child care programs is directly linked to the specialized training received by the program's practitioners. Wages are key predictors of quality, although child caregivers' are among the lowest paid workers in the United States. The newsletter concludes by asserting that the solutions for the personnel challenges in early childhood require consideration of multiple factors and perspectives, and that both professional development and compensation need to be addressed simultaneously. (KB)

No. 18 January 2000

# Teacher education, wages key to outcomes

This *Spotlight* was prepared by the National Center for Early Development & Learning and synthesizes information presented at the Making Gains conference held at UNC-Chapel Hill in February, '99. Conference sponsors were the Center for the Child Care Workforce, Day Care Services Assn. Inc., the NC Dept. of Health and Human Services's Division of Child Development, the NC Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, and NCEDL.

## Staff Education, Compensation 'Critical' to Improving Quality

Research shows that well educated and compensated teachers and providers are key elements to early childhood program quality and outcomes for children.

- High quality early care and educational child care positively predict children's language, math and social skills at least through kindergarten and in many cases, through the end of the second grade.
- Unfortunately, the typical quality of early childhood classrooms is considerably below what is considered good practice.
- Children with closer relationships to their preschool teachers have better thinking/attention skills, better language skills, are more sociable and show fewer behavior problems.
- Teaching staff provide more sensitive and appropriate caregiving if they
  - Earn higher wages and better benefits
  - Work at centers devoting a higher percentage of the operating budget to teaching personnel
  - Complete more years of formal education
  - Receive early childhood training at the college level

### Education

The quality of child care programs is directly linked to the specialized training received by practitioners in these programs; however, a majority of early childhood teachers have less than a bachelor's degree.

- Teachers' specialized training has a positive effect on quality for children, both in centers and family child care.
- Features such as caregiver/teacher qualifications are important for setting the stage for better quality.

### YET

Only a third of infant child care providers have specialized training in child development and only 18% have a bachelor's degree or higher.

### Compensation

Wages are key predictors of program quality yet the early childhood workforce is among the lowest-paid class of workers in the US.

- The quality of a program is related to the continuity of employment of trained adults.
- Centers that paid better wages experienced less teaching staff turnover.
- Skilled teaching staff are more likely to remain at their jobs if they earn higher-than-average wages, work with a higher percentage of well-trained staff, and work in a climate where other well-trained and educated teachers (as well as the director) remain on the job.

### YET

- Teachers at the lowest-paid level earn an average of \$7.50 an hour or \$13,125 a year.
- Only 20% of centers offer fully paid health coverage of teachers.
- Real wages for most child care teaching staff have remained stagnant over the past decade.
- Staff turnover is high, ranging from 25-50% a year.

## Conclusions

The personnel challenges in the early childhood profession are complex. Solutions require consideration of multiple factors and perspectives.

It is not effective to address professional development and compensation as independent factors because improvements in one may create problems in the other. For example, when policies require higher education standards, but do not improve compensation, turnover of staff may be an unintended and negative result.

## Making Gains Conference Resources

The first national conference to address compensation and professional development, *Making Gains*, was held in Chapel Hill in early 1999. It brought together 21 teams (10 state, 10 North Carolina county and 1 national team) to create ways to link professional development and compensation in their local contexts.

Our URL for the *Making Gains* conference website is [www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PAGES/mgconf.htm](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PAGES/mgconf.htm)

Information about the following state and national initiatives was shared at the *Making Gains* conference and is available at the above website: Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Georgia, California, Canada, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood and Child Care WAGE\$ Project.

Presentations and remarks by the following speakers are also available at our website:

- *Principles for Compensation Initiatives*, Rosemarie Vardell & Marci Andrews, Center for the Child Care Workforce
- *Closing Remarks*, Joan Lombardi
- *Modeling the Policy Infrastructure Towards Improved Compensation*, Anne Mitchell & Louise Stoney.

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